

Nat Feshan PAC

Remarks at award ceremony, May 6, 1997.

Thank you for this award. I appreciate your recognition. And thank you for the nice introduction.

When thinking about what I wanted to say, I thought I'd let you know what is important to me. First is the pursuit of happiness, true happiness and joy of life. When I first became involved in the homophile movement in 1963, Frank Kameny was fond of reminding us that this was the only country specifically protecting the pursuit of happiness in its constitution. The acknowledgment of the right to look for and find happiness that fits one's needs is an acknowledgment of the value of the individual and her uniqueness. We should remember the entitlement we are granted by our Constitution to be happy and act on this right. In the last few weeks, who could fail to be impressed by the courage of Ellen as she boldly acted on the entitlement to be happy and thus freed herself.

Clearly the pursuit of happiness is not just a political issue but a personal one. We need to know what gives us joy and get a picture of what it is or would be like to be truly happy. That way our vision has guiding power and becomes a magnet pulling us to fulfillment. Last week, when watching Oprah interview Ellen, I was delighted and moved by the beauty of the people in the audience, who were made radiant by their joy and happiness at what they were witnessing. I wonder how many later decided to come out??

I personally attribute my successful involvement in the homophile movement by the choice I made to pursue my happiness. Prior to making that choice, I was so depressed I seriously considered suicide. The reason for my depression was the lack of someone who could ^{return} reciprocate my love. I thought that perhaps I was not meant to be on this planet and that it was impossible to find happiness here. I decided that I would not choose to live if I could not find love, and I opted to make each day a gift to myself, no longer trying to please others. Then I searched for other Gay people. For two years in my early 20s my life was on probation. Then the miracle happened, and I found the proof that happiness was possible. I was also amazed and overjoyed at meeting other Gay people, marveling at their lives.

I was immediately convinced that antigay prejudice was a huge mistake, a tremendous hoax perpetrated on an unwitting society, a mammoth distortion of the truth. It was natural for me to join the Mattachine Society and work for

Gay rights. I knew the truth, and I wanted to defend it, not just for the sake of Gay people but for the sake of society as a whole, which was cheating itself of the gifts of its Gay citizens.

To me homosexuality always had to do with love, with sex, too, of course, but not just with sex. Because my ability to love was the most precious thing about me, I could not condone its degradation. I had enormous confidence in being right. Frank Kameny used to declare that we are the experts on homosexuality, not society! I knew he was right, although I also found out that Gay women and men who were not self-accepting often fell prey to the very misconceptions about us that heterosexuals entertained. And it happened that sometimes straight people were more enlightened than we. Take George Weinberg, who coined the term homophobia. As a straight psychologist and author, he was a very early champion of Gay rights, encouraging us to savor the joys of the Gay world and defining hostility toward us as an illness that must be cured.

Another thing that is important to me is my proposal to substitute the term Gay love style for Gay lifestyle. The word lifestyle to describe the life of a Gay or bisexual woman or man bothers me because it is incorrect. There is no Gay lifestyle, there is only a Gay lovestyle. Homosexuals are connected by an affinity toward the same gender which is much broader than a pure sexual orientation. I think Lesbians and Gay men who are self-accepting have in common a love style. Sex by itself has never defined a complete person straight or Gay. The term lifestyle is also misleading because Lesbians and Gay men don't have a single lifestyle but many, just like heterosexuals. Another problem with the term lifestyle is that it has been appropriated by those who are ignorant and hostile and want to condemn us. To them the Gay lifestyle is a shameful, destructive, and predatory pursuit of sexual promiscuity, thus forging a stereotype of a destructive way of life.

A third thing that is very important to me is creative self-development, which is defined in the brochure of the Program for Creative Self-Development as bringing the unconscious seed of individuality to conscious awareness and expression. The idea of life as an apprenticeship has always appealed to me, and the art of living is part of that. As a psychotherapist I am pursuing my own growth and self-development, as well as helping other Lesbians and Gay men and Gay-friendly people come into their own.

Creative self-development is a very positive orientation toward life, specifically geared toward Thank you. Gay women & men, & all Gay-friendly people. Principle 1 of the Program for Creative Self-Development states that "evolving as an individual is a joyful & amazing process." My own life attests to that.